

State/National news in brief

In two incidents across the state, citizens rise to need

SYRACUSE (AP) — A group of motorists stopped after a traffic accident to lift a car off an elderly man, while hours before and 175 miles to the northeast a passing driver saw a police officer in trouble and brought help.

Police credited the quick action of citizens in both cases Saturday for problems from critical on Saturday, a University Hospital spokeswoman said. "I don't know where they came from," witness Robin Milliken told the Syracuse newspapers about the volunteers' quick action after the accident. "Just good Samaritans, I guess."

Smith had just been dropped off and was starting to cross the street when he was hit, Syracuse Police Capt. David Barrette said.

The man accused of driving the car that hit him, Kelvin Cannon, 32, of Syracuse, told police he had swerved to avoid Smith but that Smith kept walking into the path of the car.

Smith struck the car's windshield, causing a large hole, before he was pushed under the car.

After the accident, about eight people — including Cannon — stopped their cars and ran to help, police said. They lifted the car off Smith to free him before police and emergency crews arrived. One passerby who is a doctor tended to Smith until emergency workers and police arrived shortly after 7 p.m., police said.

Monty Python star has fun with honorary professorship at Cornell

ITHACA (AP) — Call him Professor Slapstick.

John Cleese — the British actor-comedian known for his roles in Monty Python's Flying Circus — has been given an honorary professorship at Cornell University.

During a discussion on the mechanics of humor Saturday, Cleese gave his new title a spin.

"I would be delighted to answer anything, provided that you call me, Professor Cleese," he said to a crowd of about 1,200 students.

Cleese was made an honorary A.D. White professor-at-large — a program named after Cornell's first president. He is expected to lecture at Ithaca once a year for the next six years.

"I have only one criticism, other than the coffee," he joked. "I think that we should move this campus about 800 miles south."

Cleese, 59, often performed slapstick in his movie and TV roles. On Saturday, he acted like a professor.

"Is all this going to be on a test later?" one student asked.

"Yes," Cleese replied. "And I'll give you the reading list at the end."

New suspect in 1982 killings charged by police

CHICAGO (AP) — The man whose videotaped confession to two killings freed another man from death row last week has surrendered to police.

Alstony Simon, 48, was formally charged Sunday with the 1982 killings of two teen-agers. His estranged wife, Inez Jackson, also surrendered to Chicago police and was charged with obstruction of justice for keeping her husband's role in the slayings a secret, authorities said.

They both were scheduled to appear in bond court today.

Anthony Porter, now 43, was freed Friday from Cook County Jail after 17 years behind bars. Last September, he was within two days of execution for the killings when the Illinois Supreme Court decided to review his case because of his low IQ.

Witnesses in the case against Porter have now allegedly recanted their testimony.

Simon, of Milwaukee, plans to plead innocent to the charges, said his lawyer, Jack Rimland.

In a telephone interview with WTMJ-AM in Milwaukee, Rimland said Simon's videotaped comments "indicated he was acting in self-defense, based on my viewing of it."

Police say Simon confessed Wednesday to the fatal shootings of Jerry Hillard, 18, and Marilyn Green, 19, while being questioned on videotape by Chicago private investigator Paul Ciolino.

Study: Blood pressure diet has particular benefit for blacks

CHICAGO (AP) — A low-fat, higher-protein diet rich in fruits and vegetables may be the best treatment for blacks suffering from hypertension, a new study suggests.

Researchers examined the effects of three dietary patterns on blood pressure in 459 adults with normal-but-high to high blood pressure. Sixty percent of the participants were black, 34 percent were white and 6 percent were of other races, according to an article in today's edition of the Archives of Internal Medicine.

The researchers found that blood pressure was lowered in people with blood pressure at the high end of normal, thus reducing the need for medication.

One researcher cautioned that people should not switch their diet or change the way they take medication without first consulting a physician. Still, she raved about the study's findings.

"We are talking about a diet with the potential of preventing and treating hypertension and doing it particularly well in people at risk, African Americans and people with high blood pressure," said Dr. Laura Svetkey, associate professor of medicine at Duke University Medical Center and lead author of the study.

High blood pressure is a major threat to heart function that affects about 50 million adults in the United States. It increases the risk of heart failure, heart attack, stroke and kidney failure.

Researchers wanted a majority of black participants because previous studies showed blacks are about 40 percent more likely than whites to have high blood pressure. Blacks also tend to develop it earlier and more severely, according to authors of the study, named "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension," or DASH.

High-tech toys — the rage of the day — drop in price

NEW YORK (AP) — Unlike the child-to-doll talks of the past, when a kid speaks to My Best Friend, it won't be an imaginary conversation.

The Play-by-Play doll is capable of carrying on a limited conversation, thanks to voice-recognition technology. If she asks a question and a wrong answer is given, she will encourage the child to try again.

My Best Friend, on display at the American International Toy Fair beginning today, is just one example of the latest movement in the toy industry: It's technologically innovative and — at about \$40 — inexpensive.

"It's easy to build a great toy, but it's hard to sell it at the right price," said Sean McGowan, a toy analyst at the investment firm Gerard Klauer Mattison. "This year, we are seeing great use of technology at really affordable prices."

Toy makers have stepped up their high-tech offerings in recent years to make playtime more entertaining and challenging for today's computer-literate kids.

But innovation hasn't always come cheap. In the past, these toys — especially the most advanced — have been expensive — many selling in excess of \$100, above what most value-conscious Americans will pay for a single toy.

Entering 1999, high-tech toy prices are going the way of computer prices: Better products for less.

A (computer) chip you could buy in 1980 for \$4,000 is now selling for under a \$1," said Doug Glen, chief strategy officer at Mattel Inc., the world's biggest toy maker. "None of us could do what we are doing now at a reasonable price just a few years ago."

Many toy makers also watched the success of Furby last year. Consumers were amazed with its ability to speak 800 words and phrases and actually interact with kids.

NASA spacecraft pursuing comet to collect its dust

By MARCIA DUNN

AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — For the next seven years, the mission of the Stardust spacecraft is to chase a comet, for the grand goal of collecting less than a thimble's worth of comet dust.

While the size of the catch may seem minute, if successfully captured, the tiny sample could provide scientists with fascinating information about the origins of the universe.

"Comets can tell us about the history of the early solar system and the early history perhaps of our own Earth," explained the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Martha Hanner, an astronomer taking part in the historic Stardust mission.

NASA's Stardust spacecraft began its 3 billion-mile journey Sunday, soaring into a clear afternoon sky aboard a Boeing Delta rocket. It is the first attempt to gather material from beyond the moon and return it to Earth. A fleeting radar problem delayed the flight one day.

"It's most exciting to get this beautiful spacecraft on its way," said Stardust's chief scientist, Donald Brownlee, a University of Washington astronomer.

It is also the first time NASA has sent a robot on an extraterrestrial pickup and delivery mission. The last time the agency went after samples in outer space was Apollo 17 in 1972, the last of the manned lunar landings.

"Not only do we have to get to where we're going... but then we've got to turn around and come home again," said Carl Pilcher, NASA's science director for solar system exploration. "This certainly adds a new level of complexity and difficulty."

Scientists feel it's worth the extra effort and risk.

Comets are frozen time capsules; the icy, rocky bodies are thought to be pieces of the original building blocks of the solar system and may well contain compounds from which life formed. Abundant in water and carbon-based molecules, comets continually bombarded Earth some 4 billion years ago.

Stardust is to meet up with Comet Wild-2 in January 2004, passing within some 90 miles of the 2 1/2-mile-diameter iceball. The comet is named for its discoverer, retired astronomy professor Paul Wild, pronounced Vilt, who traveled from Switzerland to be on hand for launch.

Tiny comet fragments — no bigger than a grain of salt — hopefully will be trapped by a pop-up collector that's covered with a transparent, ultralight glass foam called aerogel. The most vulnerable parts of the 850-pound spacecraft, about the size of a large refrigerator, are shielded to protect against the swirl of particles.

"We're going as close as we can without getting killed," said Brownlee.

If all goes well, the comet samples — along with interstellar dust gathered en route to the comet — will reach Earth in January 2006. The return capsule will separate from Stardust at an altitude of 69,000 miles and parachute into the Utah desert; Stardust will remain in orbit around the sun.

By then, comet discoverer

Wild will be 80 years old. He hopes to be around for the celebration.

"If it all works very well, of course, that will be gorgeous," Wild said. "But there are many possibilities of failure or partial failure."

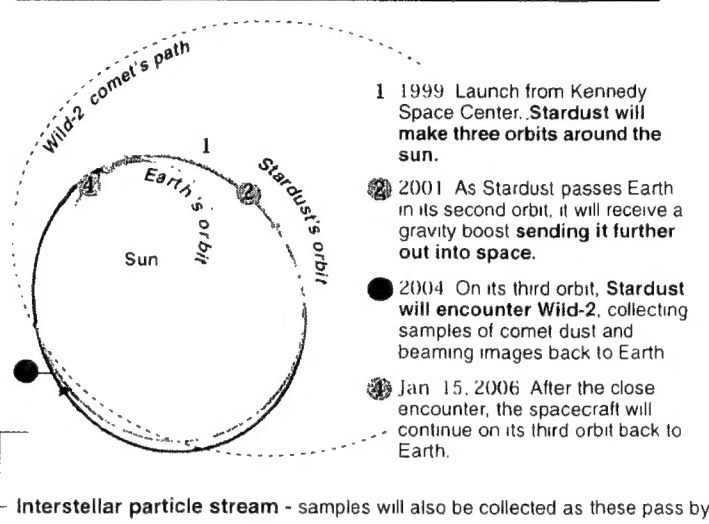
Even less than a thimble full of comet dust would be plenty. The kind of detailed analysis that's planned, scientists say. Even the fanciest science instruments on a spacecraft cannot begin to compare with the electron microscopes in laboratories on Earth.

This is the first U.S. mission devoted solely to a comet. NASA plans three more over the next four years, two of which will attempt landings.

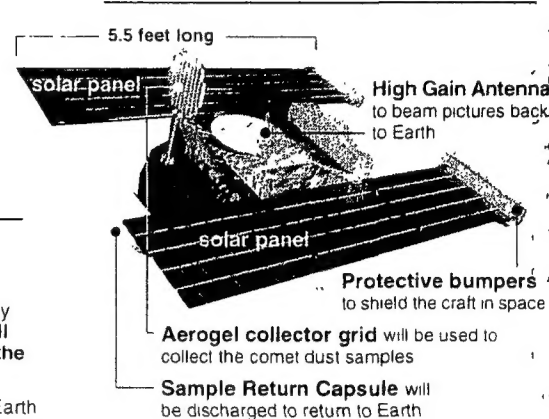
Collecting stardust

NASA has launched a \$200 million space probe named Stardust to intersect the path of the comet Wild-2. If successful, it will bring back the first samples of an actual comet's body — material that reportedly hasn't changed since the birth of our solar system.

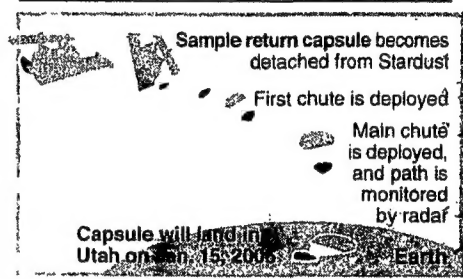
Orbit to a close encounter



The Stardust



The landing



Boys use survival tactics during cold night on mountain

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS

Associated Press Writer

SANDPOINT, Idaho (AP) — As night fell in the Selkirk Mountains, and freezing wind whipped snowdrifts even deeper, three lost teen-agers settled on a survival strategy: cling together and pray.

"There wasn't much to do but keep yourself huddled together," said Aaron Baudry-Peterson on Sunday, recalling the cold night stranded with two 15-year-old ski pals. "So I sat there and I prayed all night long."

The trio, who were part of a Spokane, Wash., church group's Saturday outing to the Schweitzer Mountain ski resort, carved a snow cave where they passed their sleepless, cold night.

On Sunday, they trekked seven miles through waist-deep snow, eventually stumbling upon the home of Bill Findley, a member of the

sheriff's search and rescue team.

"They were soaked clear through and shaking," Findley said. "Their hands were pure white."

Baudry-Peterson, 15, Justin Haeger and the third youth, whose identity was not released, suffered no permanent injuries, authorities said.

The trio weren't alone in their ordeal. Two other boys, Canadian residents A.J. Kolla, 13, and his 15-year-old brother Mike, also were stranded on the mountain Saturday.

They were spotted by volunteer searchers about 4:20 p.m. Sunday, walking along a snowmobile trail about two miles from the ski resort.

They also appeared to escape serious injuries, said Bonner County Sheriff's Cpl. Bob Howard.

"They came at us, hugging," said Dennis McIntire, a volunteer rescuer. "We gave them nut rolls and Gatorade."

Peter Gillis, the ski resort's general manager, said that extreme weather conditions Saturday — including wind gusts of up to 50 mph and 18 inches of new snow — likely caused the boys to get lost on the mountain.

Both groups of boys followed

standard survival tactics by seeking shelter that shielded them from the wind and 20-degree nighttime temperatures, preserving their body heat, rescuers said.

"It's great! They're home," said Karen Haeger, Justin's mother, upon the boys' safe return.

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Avalanches in California, Colorado, Utah, kill five

TRUCKEE, Calif. (AP) — An avalanche in the Sierra Nevada buried four people for hours, killing one, while three men died in an avalanche in the Colorado Rockies and a man on snowshoes was engulfed in a massive slide in Utah.

In California, where 2 feet of snow recently fell in the Lake Tahoe area, three men and a woman were sledding Saturday afternoon when a block of snow gave way.

All four people were buried in up to 6 feet of snow as they walked along the shore of a lake in the northern Sierra Nevada, 35 miles west of Reno, Nev.

Derek Lerch, 21, said he and Harry Eichelberger, 21, of Chicago, were buried close enough to each other that they could talk. But they lost contact with their friends and assumed they were dead.

"We were talking about our best options," Lerch said. "At first, I made a vent that I could breathe through. Harry used the vent with me for the next several hours until we lost oxygen. He then decided to climb out. It wasn't easy, but he made it."

Eichelberger, who was buried for four hours, reached a nearby cabin across the lake at 9:30 p.m.

About 15 cabin occupants — young members of a Dartmouth College alumni group — quickly responded. Wearing headlamps and using rakes, brooms and mops as probes, they dug out the other three.

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